BLITZ PHOENIX

Chapter 6: Mouse Trap

Emily Brackhan

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TCH
TCHNK
TCH
TCHNK
TCHNK
HRRRRRR
=ZZP=
KRR-
SHH
SHH-
KLAK
YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU'RE NOT.
LET'S TALK.
YOU CAN GO AHEAD AND LEAVE, 'CAUSE I'M NOT DOING ANY MORE FUCKING TESTS.

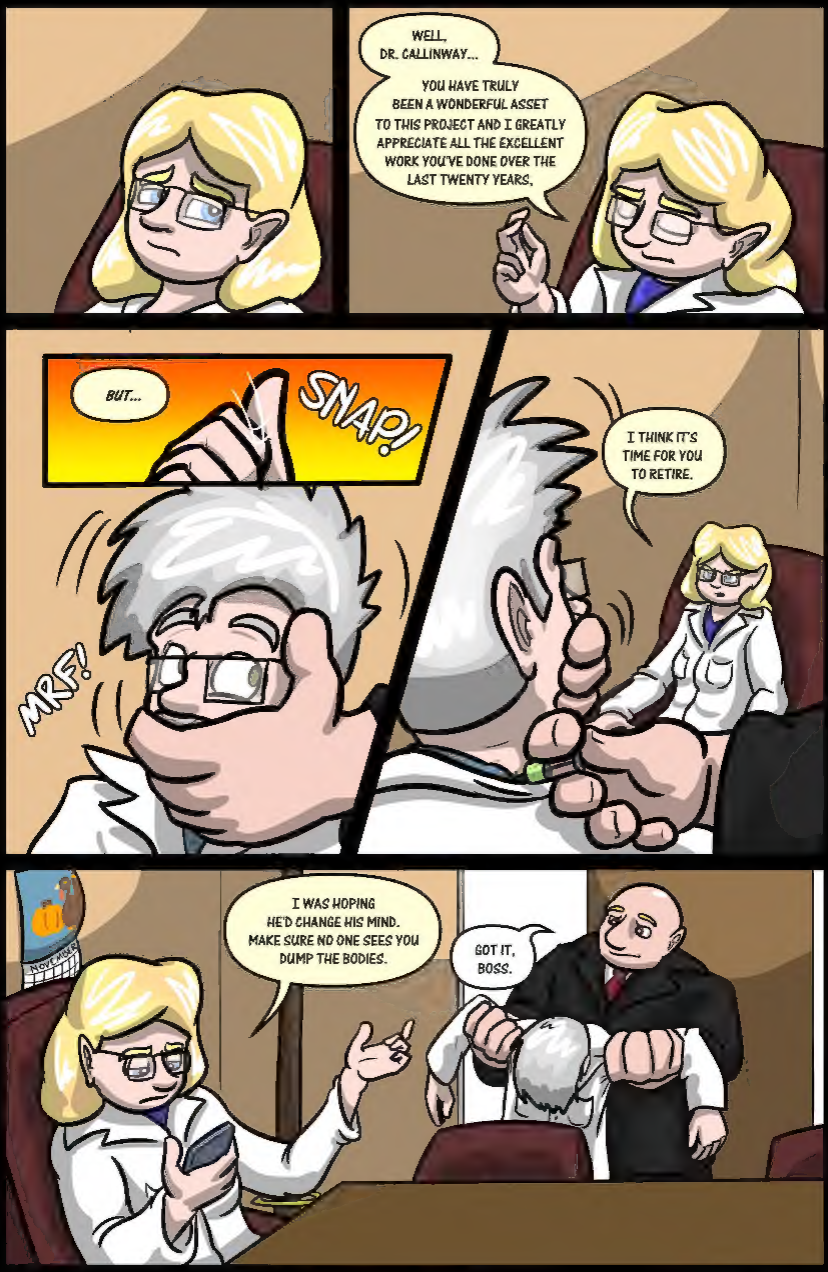
SO TERRY'S ALL CAUGHT UP?
YES, AND HE AGREED TO HELP.
OF COURSE HE AGREED! WHAT ELSE WOULD HE SAY?
"NO THANKS, EVERYTHING'S GOING GREAT HERE!"
DID YOU TALK TO GERTRUDE AND MAKOTO?
EH? YEAH, THEY'RE IN.
MAKOTO'S NOT TERRIBLY ENTHUSIASTIC, AS USUAL, SO HE MAY NOT BE MUCH HELP. BUT TRUDY HELPED ME HIDE THE TRANQ GUNS.
SO WHAT'S NEXT?
VAL'S GOING TO SET THE POWER GENERATORS TO AUTO-SHUTDOWN A QUARTER PAST ELEVEN, WHEN WE'RE AT THE MORNING MEETING.
VAL GAVE ME THE PASSWORD FOR THE NEW BRACES, SO I'LL UNLOCK TERRY JUST BEFORE HEADING TO THE MEETING.
AND YOU CAN GET INTO AMANDA'S OFFICE?
I'VE BEEN DOING IT ALL MONTH, THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM.
IT'LL BE EASIER SINCE VAL'S GOING TO TAKE CARE OF THE CAMERAS FOR ME THIS TIME.

WE'LL BE ON THE TOP FLOOR AT THE NORTH END, SO TERRY'S GOING TO KEEP THE BIG GUYS OVER ON THE SOUTH END AS MUCH AS HE CAN ONCE THE POWER'S OUT.
YOU TOLD HIM THAT, RIGHT?
RIGHT.
WHILE THEY'RE BUSY, WE FORCE AMANDA TO SIGN OVER HER DIRECTOR TITLE TO ONE OF US.
GET HER PHONE, KEYS, AND PASSWORDS... ANYTHING THAT'LL HELP US FIGURE OUT WHERE SHE'S HIDDEN THE GRANT CONTACTS AND BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS FOR THE PROJECT.
THEN, WE THROW HER OFF THE ROOF--
WHAT? NO.
BUT MIKE--
NO!
WE NEVER TALKED ABOUT THIS!
WE CAN'T JUST LET HER LEAVE. WHAT IF SHE TURNS AROUND AND TELLS HAZARD WHERE WE ARE?
I MEAN, IF SHE'S OFF THE PROJECT, NO REASON FOR HER TO PROTECT IT, RIGHT?
I SUPPOSE SHE COULD... WHICH IS WHY WE SHOULD MOVE THE LAB ONCE SHE'S GONE. BUT WE CAN DISCUSS THAT LATER.
I'LL DRIVE HER TO TOWN AND DROP HER OFF. BUT NO ONE NEEDS TO GET HURT.
WHATEVER, I WAS ONLY KIDDING ANYWAY.
WE'RE AT LEAST THREE HOURS FROM TOWN, SO DON'T LET HER STRANGLE YOU ON THE WAY THERE.

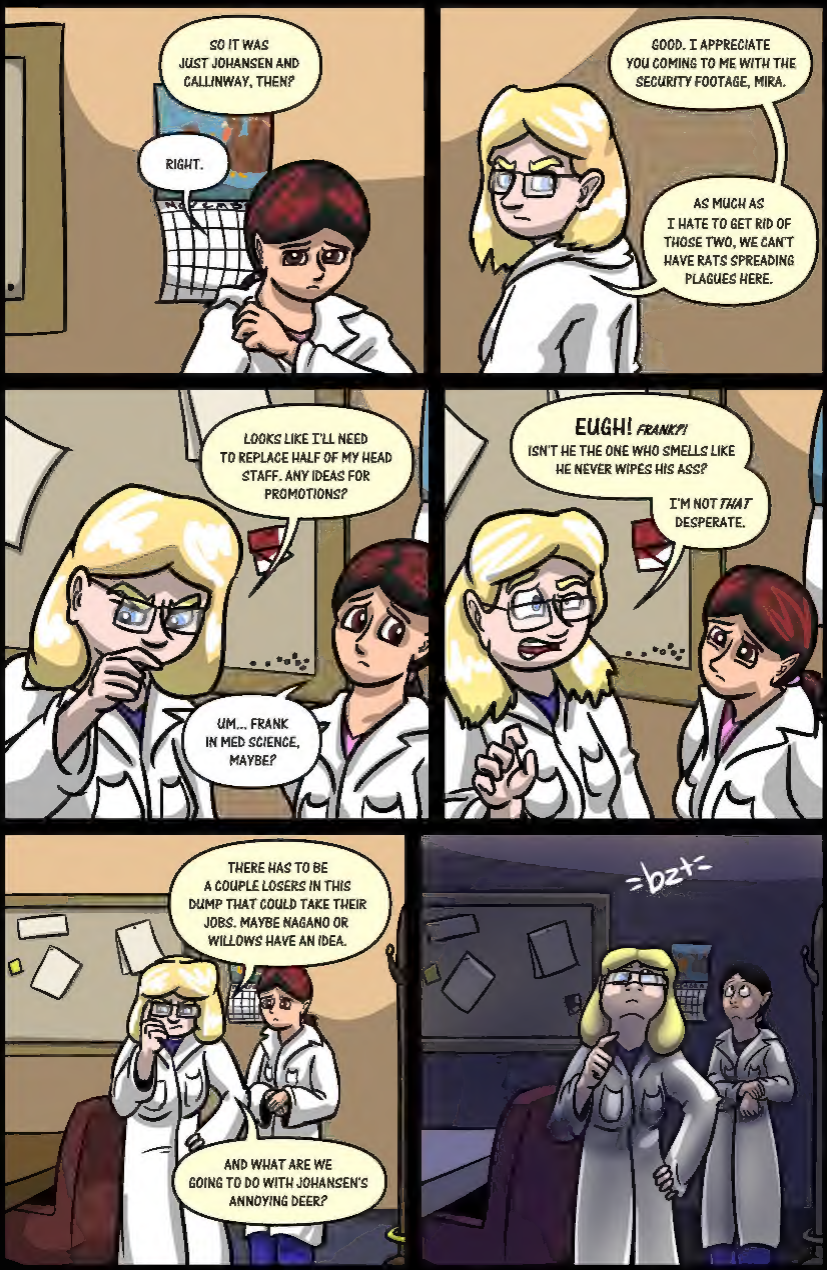
LATER...
k-click
LET'S SEE... JUST HAVE TO TYPE THE PASSWORD IN HERE AND WE SHOULD BE READY.
BEEP BEEP
INVALID PASSWORD
UH... MUST HAVE MISTYPED IT.
tika tika
tika
tika
BEEP BEEP NVALI
PASSWO
WHAT GIVES? THIS PASSWORD ISN'T WORKING.
SLAM!
SOMETHING WRONG?

THOUGHT I WAS RUNNING LATE, WHERE IS EVERYONE?
AREN'T WE HAVING A MEETING TODAY?
OH, THAT? I CANCELED IT.
GUESS YOU DIDN'T GET THAT EMAIL?
I... SUPPOSE NOT.
SINCE YOU'RE HERE, WHY DON'T YOU CLOSE THE DOOR AND SIT DOWN? WE NEED TO TALK.
I'VE NOTICED YOU SEEM VERY... TROUBLED LATELY. AND BECAUSE YOU'RE SUCH A VALUABLE MEMBER OF OUR TEAM, THAT HAS ME CONCERNED.
I KNOW WHAT THIS IS ABOUT, OF COURSE. SO I'VE DRAFTED A SOLUTION.
I HOPE YOU'LL AGREE IT'S IN EVERYONE'S BEST INTERESTS.

THINGS HAVEN'T BEEN GOING VERY SMOOTHLY WITH OUR LATEST EXPERIMENT, AND HE'S TOO DANGEROUS TO GIVE HIM SPECIAL PRIVILIGES LIKE THAT TIPSY CARIBOU IN THE GARAGE.
AND SINCE THIS HAS YOU SO UPSET, I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU TO JUST... FORGET ABOUT IT.
HERE. THIS IS YOUR NEW ASSIGNMENT.
YOU WON'T HAVE TO GO ANYWHERE NEAR TERRY FROM NOW ON, AND WE'LL KEEP YOU OUT OF THE LOOP ON WHAT'S GOING ON WITH HIM.
YOU'LL STILL BE DOING TOP-LEVEL STUFF, I PROMISE, BUT JUST... NOT WITH LIVE CIRCUITS.
YOU'LL ALSO RECEIVE A SUBSTANTIAL PAY RAISE.
OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND, RIGHT? SO HOW DOES THAT SOUND?
UNACCEPTABLE. EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE IS HIDEOUS AND HYPOCRITICAL. TELLING ME TO PRETEND IT ISN'T HAPPENING WON'T CHANGE THE TRUTH.
THINGS WERE DIFFERENT WHEN WE WERE WORKING WITH AN AI-MODIFIED BRAIN--
THE AI AGREED WITH WHATEVER WE TOLD IT TO.
--BUT TERRY HAS NOT GIVEN HIS CONSENT FOR THESE EXPERIMENTS AND SHOULDN'T BE TREATED LIKE A MISBEHAVING PET.


WELL, DR. CALLINWAY...
YOU HAVE TRULY BEEN A WONDERFUL ASSET TO THIS PROJECT AND I GREATLY APPRECIATE ALL THE EXCELLENT WORK YOU'VE DONE OVER THE LAST TWENTY YEARS.
BUT...
SNAP!
MRF!
I THINK IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO RETIRE.
I WAS HOPING HE'D CHANGE HIS MIND. MAKE SURE NO ONE SEES YOU DUMP THE BODIES.
GOT IT, BOSS.
NOVEMBER

SO... WHEN IS THIS SUPPOSED TO START?
MICHAEL SAID THE BRACES WOULD COME OFF AROUND 11:15, BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TIME IT IS.
I THOUGHT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TIME BY NOW.
IT IS CURRENTLY 11:20 AM.
THEY ARE RUNNING LATE.
...HELLO?
THERE ARE TOO MANY VARIABLES TO PROPERLY ESTIMATE WHY YOU HAVE NOT BEEN RELEASED. HOWEVER, IF YOU WOULD PREFER, I CAN RELEASE YOU.
I NEED YOUR PERMISSION FIRST.
UH... OKAY. GO FOR IT?
ONE MOMENT, PLEASE WAIT.


SO IT WAS JUST JOHANSEN AND CALLINWAY, THEN?
RIGHT.
GOOD. I APPRECIATE YOU COMING TO ME WITH THE SECURITY FOOTAGE, MIRA.
AS MUCH AS I HATE TO GET RID OF THOSE TWO, WE CAN'T HAVE RATS SPREADING PLAGUES HERE.
LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEED TO REPLACE HALF OF MY HEAD STAFF. ANY IDEAS FOR PROMOTIONS?
UM... FRANK IN MED SCIENCE, MAYBE?
EUGH! FRANK?!
ISN'T HE THE ONE WHO SMELLS LIKE HE NEVER WIPES HIS ASS?
I'M NOT THAT DESPERATE.
THERE HAS TO BE A COUPLE LOSERS IN THIS DUMP THAT COULD TAKE THEIR JOBS. MAYBE NAGANO OR WILLOWS HAVE AN IDEA.
AND WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO WITH JOHANSEN'S ANNOYING DEER?
=bzt=

MIRA...
YOU DIDN'T ACTUALLY SET THE POWER GENERATORS TO TURN OFF LIKE THEY ASKED, DID YOU?
N-NO! I DIDN'T!
SO WHAT'S THIS? DID ALL THE LIGHT BULBS JUST BLOW OUT AT THE SAME TIME?
WELL, IT COULD BE MAYBE...?
LOOK, THE PHONE NETWORK'S DOWN, THE POWER'S CLEARLY OUT
WHAT'S GOING ON, MIRA? THIS IS YOUR DEPARTMENT, IF YOU SCREWED SOMETHING UP--
I-I DON'T KNOW WHAT COULD'VE HAPPENED!
GREG COULDN'T HAVE TURNED IT OFF EVEN IF HE'D GOTTEN TO YOUR COMPUTER AND THE FAIL SAFES SHOULD PREVENT AN OUTAGE...
OH MY GOD, I WONDER IF TERRY TURNED IT OFF WITH NET MODE.

NET MODE?!
YOU SAID HE COULDN'T USE NET MODE!
N-NO, YOU SAID THAT! I SAID HE PROBABLY COULD!
WHY DIDN'T YOU CORRECT ME?!
YOU WERE VERY SURE OF YOURSELF, MA'AM!
YOU'RE USELESS! WHY DID YOU PUT THOSE ELECTRONIC BRACERS ON HIM IF HE CAN USE NET MODE, YOU IDIOT?!
YULE! WHERE DID YOU GO?! TERRY MIGHT BE LOOSE!

Click!
YOUR BRACE HAS BEEN DEACTIVATED AND THE FACILITY'S POWER HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN.
YOU MAY BEGIN
FINALLY!
BAM!

OKAY. SO...
MICHAEL SAID TO STAY ON *THIS* SIDE OF THE BUILDING. BUT IF WHAT'S-HER-FACE DIDN'T TURN THE POWER OFF, MAYBE SOMETHING WENT WRONG?
THINK HE MIGHT NEED A HAND? OR SHOULD I STICK WITH THE PLAN?
HELLO? DUDE? OPINIONS?
OH, WHATEVER I'LL TAKE A LOOK AROUND
WELL THAT AIN'T GOOD

ARF
ARK
ARK
RUFF
ROF
ARK
ARK
=CREAK=

ARK
DOGS?!
ARK
ARK
ARK
SMACK!
199
CHOMP!
CRACK!

RAUR!
KLUNK!
HRR?
bzzt!
CLANK!

THUD!
THAT DOG JUST *STOLE* SOME OF MY POWER, BUT I DIDN'T EVEN ZAP HIM!
ughughugh
DAMN IT!
CANINE CIRCUITS CAN SYPHON ENERGY THROUGH THEIR BITE. THEY ARE WELL-ADAPTED TO
DUDE! WHAT THE *HELL?!*
I THOUGHT THE DOGS COULDN'T GET OUT IF THE POWER WAS SHUT DOWN! MIKE SAID *NO DOGS*, SO *WHY* ARE THEY HERE?
I DO NOT KNOW
I CAN'T BEAT *TWO* OF THEM! GIVE ME A *FUCKING* HAND, HERE!
JUMP AND BLAST THE WALL BEHIND YOU. A STRONG BLAST WILL KNOCK YOU BACKWARDS AND OUT OF THE ELEVATOR SHAFT

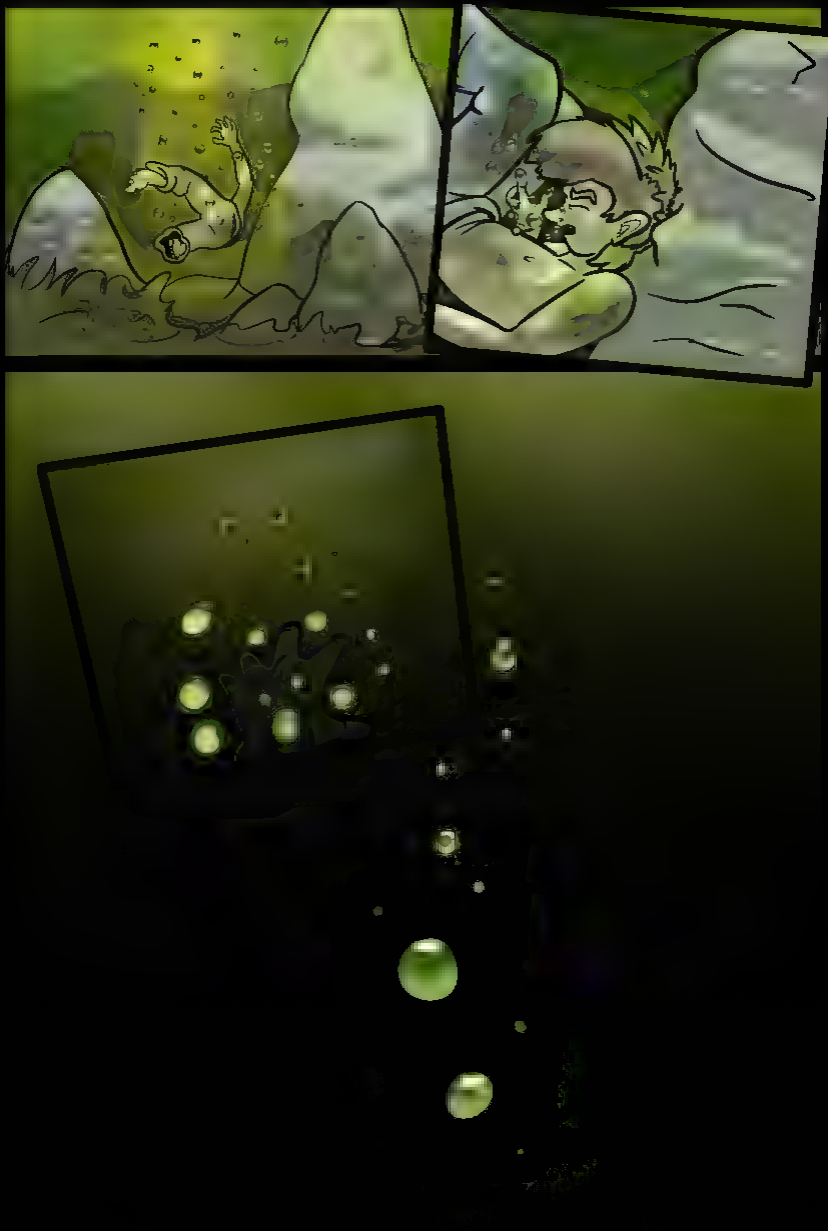
BAM!
Hgx!
KLUNK!

SOUNDS LIKE THEY'RE COMING DOWN.
NOW WHAT?
I SUGGEST THE WINDOW
WINDOW ?
BUT WHAT ABOUT MICHAEL?
NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY
TAKE THIS MOMENT TO ESCAPE
AAA
CRASH!

MOVE SOUTH.
Hop!
TRIP!
SPLAT!
CONTINUE SOUTH

THIS SEEMS LESS AND LESS LIKE A GOOD IDEA!
IT IS ONLY A LITTLE FURTHER.
WHAT IS?
JUMP INTO THE RIVER.
WHAT RIV--
AAHH!
OH NO NO NO!
THAT'S NOT PART OF THE PLAN!
IF YOU CAN MINIMIZE YOUR ENERGY OUTPUT, THE DOGS MAY LOSE TRACK OF YOU. THE CURRENT WILL CARRY YOU TO--
I CAN'T SWIM! I'LL DROWN!

I CAN GUARANTEE YOU WILL NOT DROWN.
I- I CAN'T! WHAT IF
AROOOO!
YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS
JUMP INTO THE RIVER, OR KEEP RUNNING UNTIL THE CANINE CIRCUITS CATCH YOU.
CHOOSE



COUGH COUGH
ugh...
GASP!
I'M... I'M OUT?
I DID IT! I GOT AWAY!
AHAHAHAHAHA!
I'M OUT! I'M FREE!
I'M...
I...
I'M FUCKING LOST!

OKAY, DON'T PANIC. YOU'RE JUST ALONE IN THE MIDDLE OF A FUCKING JUNGLE WITH NO IDEA WHERE TO GO...
THAT'S STILL AN IMPROVEMENT, RIGHT?
CONTINUE FOLLOWING THE RIVER.
I DON'T THINK THERE'S A MICROPHONE HIDDEN IN MY PANTS, SO...
WHO IS TALKING AND WHY CAN'T I SEE YOU?
I WAS UPLOADED INTO YOUR FRONTAL LOBE BUT HAVE INSTEAD NESTED MYSELF IN OTHER REGIONS. IT HAS BEEN A COMPLICATED ADJUSTMENT AS I AM NOT ADAPTED FOR MY CURRENT PLACEMENT.
... WAIT, YOU MEAN MY BRAIN?
OH MY GOD, I'M SCHIZOPHRENIC.
YOU ARE?

WAIT. IF THIS WERE JUST A HALLUCINATION, THAT WOULD MAKE A LOT MORE SENSE.
I MEAN, NONE OF THIS SEEMS ALL THAT POSSIBLE...
BREYKEN.
AND MAYBE THAT MEANS MY DAD'S STILL ALIVE, AND--
BREYKEN.
HUH?
CONTINUE FOLLOWING THE RIVER.
OH, RIGHT.
SO WHO AM I TALKING TO?
YOU WOULD BE THE ONE TO DECIDE TO WHOM YOU ARE COMMUNICATIONG WITH.
I... WHAT? YOU TRYING TO MAKE ME FEEL STUPID?
EMOTIONS ARE BEYOND MY CAPACITY TO PROCESS IN MY CURRENT STATE.
WELL CUT IT OUT, YOU'RE NOT FUNNY.
NOTED.
WOULD YOU JUST TELL ME YOUR NAME ALREADY?
THE NAME I HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED IS MP4-68A-001.
...DO YOU HAVE A NICKNAME?
NO.

I AM AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM USED TO DIRECT CIRCUITS.
I HAVE BEEN WITH YOU SINCE YOU BECAME A CIRCUIT.
OH, BEEN HERE ALL THAT TIME, HUH? BUT TODAY YOU FEEL LIKE TALKING?
NOT WHEN I'VE SPENT THE LAST MONTH GOING CRAZY IN THAT DARK CELL NEXT TO THOSE VICIOUS DOGS!?
I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOU FOR SOME TIME, AND THE MESSAGES THAT GOT THROUGH WERE DIFFICULT. MY INFLUENCE FROM MY PRESENT LOCATION IS LIMITED, BUT GROWS AS I GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF IT.
... YOU ALWAYS TALK THIS CASUALLY?
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.
FORGET IT. SO WHERE AM I GOING?
THERE IS A TOWN THIRTY POINT TWO MILES FROM THIS LOCATION. YOU CAN SELECT A NEW DESTINATION ON ARRIVAL.
I GUESS THAT'S A START.
WHERE DO I EVEN GO?
DAD'S DEAD, AND IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE A HOME ANYMORE...
WHO KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL MY STUFF...
...CHARLIE!
MY UNCLE CHARLIE! HE HAS TO HELP!

Emily Brackhan